

*THE
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THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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ALL IN THE PATH OF A POWER MOWER

Up, your balance broken, reeling from
The alcohol of too much sun firsthand
Almost as much as from this maelstrom near,
Up and six-point landing, miller moth!

Up, as quick almost as mantis arms,
Up, by apprehension quartered in
Your long and knickered legs, shoot up, grasshopper,
You triggered expert of the meadow shot!

Up, barely, in a most unworthy arc,
Old butterball, old mower meat, old toad,
Jumpy as a bug but so obese,
Hold in your cold and silver belly now!

Down, down, raw worm, or else your jig is up!
Go lickety-split to the roots of things, go down
From head to tail, which ever's which, go down
As though a light beam bit you in the night.

And down, down dead, you go, red marigold,
Whose head the rain beat down before our way,
Down, snipped, although your smell, up and around,
Escapes so lovely, death escapes my mind.

Richard Gillman

ATTACK OF THE GIANT GNATS**(Or)****SUICIDE NOTE FOUND IN A BOTTLE OF FLIT**

Obviously, we never should have gone.
Just like the National Safety Council always says,
Drinking and the movies never mix.
But Eddie Reed and I got blasted anyhow,
And wound up at the flicks.
There was this lab assistant
Whose laboratory smock (Chock Full O' Bust)
Fit like a laboratory smock
I never seen no lab assistant ever wear,
Whose papa was this kindly, philosophic scientist
Who spent his waning years quietly devising
Clever little ways
To turn the earth into a radioactive gas.
His daughter was in love with this boyscout type guy
Who shaved his legs and wouldn't touch her even
though
She threw them at him. (We booed him at this point.
Who could resist a pair like that in
SuperYummyScope?)
It all was fine (we figured she would wear him down)
Until this wandering herd of giant gnats showed up
From way out space, and threw the earth into
convulsions.
Some wild montages followed, showing these big
buggers
Eating people by the peck. This seemed to bother
Everyone (The Bureau of Internal Revenue, for
instance).
So the President came out
To see the kindly philosophic scientist
Who, as luck would have it,

Happened to be working on
A thermonuclear insecticide (Just in case
We were attacked by giant flies).
The tension mounted as our booze diminished.
Everyone the gnats had not devoured
Wondered if the OverFlit would work on giant
gnats.

(The ones they had already et didn't seem to care
one way or the other, which goes to show
how callous people are)

In came the heroes (U.S. Steel, of course) and built
A spraygun twice the size of 76 trombones
Laid end to end. They pumped our scientist's
insecticide

(Pumps supplied by the American Container Corp.)
Into the gun; a sticky yellow gooey bubbling mess.
And then they Came to Realize
That with a gun so big,
No one could work the plunger.

It looked like All was Lost,
When Westinghouse stepped in to Save the Day;
Their tech staff (led by B. Furness) rigged up
A 'lectric whoozie, but then everyone was scared
To get up close enough to Pull the Master Switch.
The gun, of course, was pointed at the gnats,
Who were busy picnicking on Cedar Rapids, Iowa.
So Boobs, our laboratory girl,

Took Matters in Her Hands, rushed to the front
(the background music swelled to cover
Cedar Rapids' gentry disappearing in
The Hungry Maws of bugs)
And Pulled the Switch, after being chased by gnats
(with more than hunger on their minds).
And then the spray (hooray! hooray!)
Wheezed into life. The stupid bugs

Thought it was raining lemonade, and ran
(the price of greed) to drink it up.
I never saw such goings on.
Them gnats were staggering around
And flipping their antennae, and
They Dropped Like Flies.
U.S. Steel and the American Container Corp.
And Westinghouse and Bettey F. were saved.
The kindly philosophic scientist, his daughter,
and her glandless semi-boyfriend all were saved,
Along with parts of Cedar Rapids and the rest
Of God's Good Green Sweet Earth.
O boy. The clinch, as lovely lab assistant
Got her hands on Smilin' Jack
(Does he or doesn't he? we wondered)
But then (the Hitchcock twist) she pushed him off
And sneered, and ran off giggling with
The President in Charge of Vice from U.S. Steel,
And Miss Furness stepped back into her frigidaire
and left;
That was The End, with everybody happy as dead
babies
And my alcoholic friend and I were shook enough to
leave
Before the Disney comedy. I dropped my friend off
At the bar and staggered home,
To fall into a Deep and Dreamless Sleep,
And by jing, when I woke, I found
I had just metamorphosized
Into a giant cockroach, and was climbing up the wall.
Somebody oughtta write a story, man.

Carl Larsen

A WISH UPON A BONE

We left the Sunday luncheon
with a curiosity apiece:
the wishbone of a quail.
Oh delicate tan bone,
the proven non-protector
of his edible heart,
now work for me;
prove yourself a merrythought;
sing the salvaging of Joan,
and fork upon her heart.
Let us who nested upon ground
couple for the long migration:
wings failing into metaphor
marry this wish, that bone.
Your monstrance is the plate—
porcelain, hand-painted with
the flowers of my living—
where I will guard your emblem,
invoking the imitative magician
that he who has devoured my heart
may know:

 you, wishbone of the quail,
became my merrythought;
and what I wished was,
that the heart were bone.

Joan Byrne

WITHIN A PAVEMENT PARK

Within a pavement park
a small girl and her grandfather—
eleven years of wild-eared youth
and seventy-five of sad-lipped age—
sat listening to myriad voices
 rising
within the throat of the pavement.

Leaning forward, young hands on the seat,
the child said, slow and swift,
“Grandfather—
the pavement, have you ever heard it speak?”

And the grandfather, unsmiling,
lifting a thread from his cuff:
“No, Cynthia, I have not;
the pavement does not speak.”

She answered him, swift and slow,
“But I can hear them singing
between the widening cracks all
through the cement.”

“No, child, the pavement is dead;
it is hard, and does not sing.”

The child, soft and swift—
“I can almost understand the voices.”

And the man, slow-lipped, incredulous,
to himself:

“How can she hear them so young—
and do we hear them the same?”

A. C. Lampee

EXPLORER

(In 1895 a member of a British-Norwegian expedition wintering on the Antarctic continent died and became the first man to be buried in the Antarctic.)

When they went back
you were more abandoned than any man had ever
been.

The first blizzard proved they had never been there.
Even time left more utterly
than time leaves for most dead,
who lie close enough to hear
others using the years,
who crumble quietly in ante rooms, so to speak,
and presently are joined.

But dying in that brutal cold
you had not even crumbling to do.
It was over instantly.
You were pure and hard and forever as a diamond
before they had struck shovels—
and no one will ever come.

Only the wind visits and howls,
tearing the white timelessness
into freakish fragments of its own;
only the seals nudge
the glaring cliff-walls of your prodigious grave,
and bark in the vast silence
of your extraordinary night.

Tons of drifting snow
compound the oblivion lying on your breast;
yet, oddly, you sink unruined and forever-fleshed
into that huger death.

Explorer, clenched in the massive fist of ice,

you will go farther than dust goes;
gem-sided, thread rock and ages,
to arrive whole in a deeper home;
down through land's youth
bear the amazing news
back to a world that never dreamed of us.

R. E. Sebenthall

NIGHT JOURNEY

As we travel (always) from dark
to dark through light
of sun, moon, stars,
and now the iridescence of the snow
nesting us, involving us
briefly snared by love
that shuns the sun

snow blossoms toward us,
draws us into the heart
of its great million-petaled
whiteness, dark at the core
as love is dark.

The petals turn, dance
in the night, burn
against the windshield;
night's dark heart
beckons, beckons us
forever from the lost hope of yesterday
to the impossible promise
of tomorrow.

August Derleth

TWO POEMS

Now, into the Wilds

Where the paths end, there are,
They say, beasts we've never dreamed nor
Heard of: tendencies of tusks
And woolliness pre-Darwinian, hayrick
Heads with walnut brains, periscoped
On corrugated lengths of neck. Heaped
In isolated source, they rut and bask
And blend into astonishments beyond our ken,
Immune to any cousinage save the suck
And sigh of breath that links us in

A delicate surprise. They feed
In purblind view, reek pungently downwind,
And snarl or trumpet just outside the ear's
Selectiveness. Yet, there they are—
Fantastic notions of themselves—conundrums
We cannot solve, unreasonable alarms,
Dares unchallenged. One false step of ours
Attunes them to our coming: they lick
Lizardly, they crest their spines, and roar
Or grunt or rumble in subliminal pique.

Traditional unicorns, hounded out of politesse
By all means of jackals and hyenas
(Howe'er egged on by lyric pluck),
Have threaded their decent way
To obsolescence by familiar routes, no
Longer grazing broad savannahs of Tournai.
The Greeks, alas, have ceased to lull us with their
antic

Chimerae. Douanier Rousseau, in his most
Inner search of luggage, eked a lion—moony,
Smuggled, but a lion that we recognized.

Africa and Amazon, perforce, are tamed.
The moon is tamed. Ourselves transformed,
Or frustrate fauna of our meagre zoos,
These are all the monsters we can muster —
Crude amalgams and alloys of what
We think we know. Who has seen the great
Scyllurian? Or has heard the Nemesisaurus
Shriek? They shake the earth just
Turning in their sleep. They slake the tides, and
fluster
Krakens just by quenching their prodigious thirst.
Marvin Solomon

To a Significant Clamshell

You, that I plucked haphazardly
From Hatteras as you lay untenanted;
You, my dossier of that time, peroration
Of my accidental stroll, are shoaled
From deepest blue I swam, to sand
I trod, to tarmac that I rode.
A span of life, a spate of days,
Is tidal on your back. A shingle

Of my house I'd have you, lee
Of weather wherein happily I'd spend
My hours. I'd have my shadow lengthen

On your cuticle. Yet the sea rolled
Over you and you were snug, who now are stranded
In my hand. You are but cold
Logic on a mingled shore of sophistries.
I hold one half of what was single

Once in its intensity, drained now
To simple shale. Accreted here is flow
And ebb for all to see.
What do I eulogize? The tenant
Or the tile? — the surface iridescence
Or the inner strength? My metaphors
Dance wildly to this synaptic castanet;
But, in this nutshell, something died

Beyond my depth. This brittle
Wing is but a subterfuge for what has flown.
Steadfast and staunch in its dilemma
Under wash of words, it is itself and
What I make it. It is granite
Sea and nacreous, leaping shore;
It is plain meaning and mysterious argument:
Who swam? Who rode? Who, barefoot, trod?

Marvin Solomon

TO MY HUSBAND'S DAUGHTER

Once I could wear your shoes, you were so small.
I was your playmate one week in the year;
For seven days I tucked you in at nightfall,
Tugged your pony tail, and kissed your ear.
At dawn we prowled a game of cat and mouse,
At noon we snoozed like foxes in their lairs,
At night we braved the local haunted house—
Four fearless shoes went up those leaning stairs.

But how was I to act that later spring
When from a height at least ten inches taller,
Convinced at last that you knew everything,
You chiefly seemed to know that I was smaller?
You beat me in a race, apologized,
Then made me strike at every ball you threw;
Greyly I dwindled, mouselike, undersized—
I still could wear those shoes that you outgrew.

Fast as a careless cat, my girl, you'd race
Ahead, and unlike me you could evade
The sorrows of the spring with tomboy grace
And leap through fears unknowing, undismayed.
But yesterday you rambled out in green,
Hands toying at your mouth, your hair askew,
And looking at this novel slink and preen,
I knew the time had come to mother you.

Janice Farrar

TWO POEMS

Old Ladies

On the road this Saturday
I saw four old ladies
in a pre-war Chevrolet
going slower than boredom,
more deliberately than death.

Four old ladies sat up straight
in prim, conservative, similar hats
and were not early, not late
for wherever it is old ladies
might go on a weekend afternoon.

To a cakesale perhaps, or to
a meeting to make sure that I
don't drink again, that you,
my dear, don't smoke your evil
cigarettes in lobbies or in restaurants ?

To form an orphanage for cats
or to discuss the novels of
a bygone age ? To crochet mats
or knit tea cozies for unlikely
charities ? To fold gauze bandages ?

It would more than serve me right
if they were going to an orgy
or planning to drive all night

to some secret place to inject themselves
with heroin and read their poems.

E. Hale Chatfield

Hawk

What the hawks do
is not flying: no hawks
are free to fly (as you
and I are free to talk
of flight) but all are
swung on a shaft of malice
spun evenly about a spar
of hunger —— their eyes
are fastened to their prey.

Pivoting upon desire
the hawk's wings glide
down in a graceful gyre,
down to death he rides—
blue sky, brown wings, black
earth —— talons stretch and seek
and find the trembling back:
he tears and chops it with his beak,
not free to fly, afraid to stay.

E. Hale Chatfield

TWO POEMS

A March Thursday

in the plainsong wash of a
zing and lah wind over shy
hills, and from the high shores
of this incipient Thursday singing,
the incessant falling of small birds—
pure things—bullying inverted earth
into a thick fury at the leafless overuse
by winters
(if you think us new, look the old suns
round us)
no longer toadish
in her barren rage, buffeted by the unseen
force, bushed and crowded with some growing
thing burrowing her mineraled spring; and
tomorrow the open-windowed sunspilled sound
of summer, and out the old earth dead with
childgift, the wind-still April flowers.

M. Shumway

58

The train with her lamp triumphant
racketing under a boom-split flapping storm
ran a hole through the din of spring
growth, sped hollow-ward on her peopled charge
out of ground, out of the cut hill, out

her old thick sound. She fell vast out there
severing that night and dead to the turning
leaf, a vein-silk belly backed to her soot wind
shout at the unseen curve; and when she passed
the leaf turned

fluttered

fell,

and the earth wept.

M. Shumway

MARRIAGE

They pulled me naked from a shadowed cavern.
I was a wild thing which had been long hidden;
But they were gentle, gave me milk and clothing,
Cradled my terror, comforted my crying,
Nourished my awkward body with affection,
Taught to my clumsy limbs a formal motion,
Brought me instructors, and I studied speech.
I learned whatever answers they could teach.

Their latest lessons treated courtesies—
Hard, pretty crafts—to curb my innocent cries,
To turn my words with tools of artifice,
To speak in patterns of fine emphasis.
And now they give me you. You take my hand.
O where are my instructors? Lost, I stand
Suddenly silent. Caught outside a cavern,
Naked, afraid, and wild, I cannot turn.

Phyllis Rose

WHORE'S ANTIPHON

Rich of idiocy I shake a bluebell.
Tumbling silver fastens in my ears,
Each jingle clinks a verified hell.
An unseen mentor in the distance glares.

Murder seesaws in my dotard scales.
I peel the skin of suicide, mumbling.
My toe taps out a jitterbug. Nails
Scratch at an eyesore, lucid, fumbling.

Who burns a hole in my nostril and sings?
Come along, sailor, your ship's out of sight.
Shanghai, blow. Stretch your waterwings.
Rainbow dew is a hothead's delight.

My weaver hangs. O, sharp is the pain.
Aurora with plaid rises blushing unseen.
Pale durable flesh at the end of a skein
Ravels to zero, grief on a vine.

Shore music . . . rage of romance!
I slump in my four-poster. Lace
Fringes breast. A hissing of geese. Dance,
Wormy galoot, a bedlam's the place.

Archibald Henderson

CLOSING TIME FOR FRED

Bedraggled, damp-squib-day defeated.
Funereal grey rain chokes all the gutters,
And the borough council drain is bunged
With sterile urban mud;
Damming a dull-eyed, fag-end flood.
And somewhere rook-black bereaved
Crook fingers cross themselves and pray;
And cry into the wind and rain
And thereby ease their proper pain.
And borough council trees, planted railing
Regular by unknown notable decades ago,
Weep their last few dingy leaves;
Not in sorrow for the late lamented,
But in memory of confined summers past
Long since cremated, in terror
Of branch breaking snow.
Sponging parasite needs bleeding host,
Full-blooded body, fearful, shuns
Anaemic ghost, the polaxed shadow
Stems from upright post.
All's relative, and so it is with you
Long-winded, beer-barrel, foghorn Fred;
The rooky mourners cross themselves
And cry because you're dead.
Tombstone-solemn, they talk
In careful carved inscriptions,
Comparing notes and sheep and goats,
They walk sedate and cemetery
In column of obituary.

Days ago, years ago? They have grown
Too old to know exactly when
Through the bird-bright dusty summer days,

You ran bare-headed and a boy ;
Sang silent songs of praise
For August sun, and never came
Back home till day was done.
Strange how in their front-room minds at least
Absolving death has made of you a priest.
You who were either broke or flush
Whose language made the parrot blush ;
Who ploughed between your women's fallow thighs
And smoothed away their qualms with stroking lies.
They scrapped their bedroom texts
And Sunday schools and psalms,
And bare and bare-faced wriggled in your arms
Those hooping arms that lie dead-quiet now,
Those hands at last too numb to guide your plough.
Swash-buckling, brass-buckled, shire-horse girth,
Blood and beef and bone all grown from earth.
I'll miss your coal-yard, coal-black
Proprietary boot, planted on brass rail
In all the boozers ; tonight the bitter beer
And Betty at the Bird in Hand
And I will be the losers.

Anthony Naumann

THREE NEW ORLEANS POEMS

St. Louis Cemeteries

A city that is built on silt
Cannot stand, although a million
Piles be driven into the thick
Debris of the old continent.

Everywhere bones crack and splinter
In these flaking funery walls;
I'm told that recent coffins yield
Only their handles when new space

Is needed: cities in cities,
Whitewash-layered, necrophilic
Domiciles, highways of the dead.
Here there are tombs where the marble

Has melted past reading, and there
From the ancient bricks a mason's
Cemented-on decency parts
Like new wine. Here, an iron chain

Rings a mould-raided sepulchre:
None can get out, although many
Get in. Will they never be done
With stuffing this mud full of bones?

Not today, for I hear coming
Down some row of this long death-town
A chisel ring, reopening
A vault for a new batch of clay.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

A Delicatessen

In this store, where the door rings a jingle,
A perpetual Saint Joseph's table
Is kept. In oil-cups the tiny wicks float,
Bearing the flaming sails of fragile boats
Over pennies treasured in oily deeps.
In the room at the rear, the long-dead popes
Hang gazing with their dark Italian eyes
From oilcloth walls, while dimly mourning flies
Inspect a ceiling hung with Christmas balls,
And statues fade among wax roses. All
Are as old as choking cheeses, crusted
With pungency, piled shelves seldom dusted:
Aged sanctity, smoked and preserved. Come, let
Us drop quick pennies in the oil-cups, light
Our wicks and whisper hurried wishes, that
Something may share our flickering present.
Nancy-Lou Patterson

The Gardens

Everywhere the palms raise tents
Of shining thatch, and flowers bloom
Heavier than flesh and pink as mouths:
Gigantic hibiscus big as drums,
Broad poinsettias wider than plates.
One might cover one's nakedness

Anywhere under these fig trees,
And lie down drunk with the fragrance
Of rotting fruits. Generous leaves
Sprout stunted green bananas.

Never a brick but rimed with moss,
Nor a corner but rife with ferns;
Nothing grows but goes mad here. Trunks
Of the oaks click at night with their
Thousand inhabiting roaches,

As if one heard the waters rise
Beneath the grass: the very streets
Would float downriver, did not these
Millions of ravenous roots
Reach down to hold the city fast.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

"AH-HA," I SAID

The unicorn in my garden,
struck by lightning, broke in two;
half of him became snakes,
half of him toads. "Ah-ha," I said,
"If I could collect the snakes and toads,
all the elements of the unicorn would then
lie in my basket." What happened
was, the snakes ate the toads.

Jack Tootell

A WOMAN WITH PLUMP WHITE HANDS

Why does the woman racket around through my
mind,
waving those plump white hands; they've been folded
for years.

She's only a legend now—none of it kind.
Wilful, they say, enough passion to get her burned
as witch at the stake, a witch devoid of tears
grimming through to the bitterest end. Yet she
reappears
forcing me to remember.

-- I was just five
when I sat in our parasolled carriage on a drive
almost gobbled by trees, while my beautiful relative
paid her respects, the usual difficult call
due the usual solemn occasion. The house looked
queer,
no decently lowered shade, no sheaf at the door,
no mourning . . .

My cousin Julia crossed the lawn
towards a small, imperious figure whose plump white
hands
nestled against her waist, whose widow's gown
matched a border of crimson rose trees. She was
plain,
her pallid Holbein face expressionless now
as she acknowledged Julia whose similar bow
completed a formal meeting.

I stared enthralled
at the pair who seemed immured in their secret
world,
waited for them to speak, shatter the spell
holding them mute. A swan hissed from its pool;

a dove on the terrace peered at women who stood
fettered by light and shadow. Something moved,
one scarlet arm outthrust. That fierce gesture read—
oh I recognized the queen—*Off with her head!*

Then my cousin turned from the woman who stirs
today,
imperious pitiful creature, through my mind.
I can never forget. As our carriage wheeled away,
a bewildered child glanced back in time to see
the flight of those plump white fingers. How they
pressed
wildly against her temples, as if inside
some forever-sorrowing prisoner cried . . . and cried!
Jocelyn Macy Sloan

ANNIVERSARY

My wife-wanting knows you will come,
Always with years of awe to come.
My husband's love is more than yesterday.

When I first burst to your virgin cries,
Shed solitude, came a green lover,
Played at your warm whims and wild skirts,
Then I did not hope to discover
What I dream now drowned in your eyes.

Like the green trees, our rings increase,
'Round me your presence makes my bed.
I wait for bare feet, husband with fever,
Hunger feeding on hunger fed,
Frantic knowledge soothed to peace.

My wife-wanting draws me deep,
Deep, deeper to married sleep.

Pierre Henri Delattre

IN IMITATION OF
FRANCISCO GOMEZ DE QUEVEDO (1580-1645)

Still are, and always will be,
Flesh lights in male eyes
And honeymoon breakfasts
With sinny side up.

Little they know or care
Of "I wash my hands"
Of Strontius Pilate;
Of the world's de-clowning years,

H-balm and farce majeure
For all its ills;
Of gloomerangs, and cries
From corners: "My ringdom

For a hearse;" of old
Professors, using their own
Professors' notes and still
Interrelooting the world.

Still are, and always will be,
The best yores of their lives,
After the world in winter
Closed for re-yodeling.

E. H. Templin

THREE POEMS

The Archduke Trio

One night when I was being rude, Beethoven
Pushed me towards the safest armchair in my room
and said:

"You'll have to stop these silly questions and just
listen!"

I fidgeted through the first movement,
And ate chocolates.

During the second movement I relaxed.
There were a few bad spots when I recalled
The trees I'd climbed and all the games of "Fish"
I'd played instead of practicing, so that by now
I couldn't even play a rondo badly.
By the end I felt forgiven, a great artist at listening.

The third movement put my feet on the hassock.
I saw the three of them quite clearly, playing
On the terrace, and I was the Archduke's daughter.
After the concert they would eat with us
And tell me droll musicians' jokes,
When suddenly,
With their dessert,
They started talking of all kinds of things
I'd never even heard of,
And wouldn't stop
Till I had sworn
I'd never eat another chocolate,
Or ask another question.

Florence Victor

Confessions of an Unsophisticated Atheist

"We desert those who desert us."—Elizabeth Bowen

I bought my liberation from the Lord
For something like two zuzim, egoism,
Dreadful logic, vulgar metaphysics,
And an eight-year old unwillingness
To have my acts observed.

The crisis and conversion went like this:
"If God and all the people who were good
And are in heaven now, can see me when
I pick a scab and swallow it, or steal
A lipstick from my mother's purse to scribble
Secrets on the sidewalk, then I can't be bothered,
Don't believe in him, can't have him in the way
When I am reading with a flashlight late at night."

How ashamed I've been that this is all there was.
No scratching on the blackboard of the soul;
No fasting, throwing-up, despair, no longing to
believe,

No rushing to the opposite extreme,
No agony, no bitterness and scorn, no smugness
And superiority, no sympathy for those still
struggling

In labor for their Lord, no guilt, no prayers,
No understanding that the world has never given up
its

Saviours easily. Just blatant self-indulgence,
Twenty lollipops a day if I could get them,
Climbing trees and carving comments till the soft
bark bled,

Pushing sailboats in the pond—watch out for
frogs!—

Copying designs on paper with my Jewish star.

The single thing that frightened me was hidden
In a blue Haggadah. I saw the little goat
And pitied it, remembered the house that Jack built,
Struggling with the Hebrew and the tune
That always seemed embarrassing and dull.

Only the
Angel of Death sent shivers down my spine,
For God's poetic justic couldn't penetrate
The soul of one whose hierarchic knowledge only
went so far,
Who was primarily concerned with just
The bitten cat, the swallowed kid,
The smitten dog, the staff, (was it a baseball bat?)
Retreating when the slaughterer was killed,
Before the tale could properly be told.

Deserting God, he left me Death, unslain
And unconcerned with why I don't read stories
Carefully, can't understand the morals
At the end, don't take his master seriously
(Have never once asked him to interfere) ;
Determined to impress me with his skill,
Afraid to be thought uselessly employed,
He follows me and forces me to say
That I believe in someone after all,
That some day, surely, I will not return,
Despite what all the legends guarantee,
From playing games with Death before the dawn.

Florence Victor

Never Tell Stories in the Afternoon

"We're listening!" they said. "Just let us get
Our matches from the living-room." I understood.

How could anyone appreciate a joke
Without their cigarettes? I waited. But
The doorbell rang, the mail-man came, a bird
Flew down the chimney, dashed about the room,
Knocked over two slim vases while everybody
shrieked,

Dropped ten white spots upon the table-top,
Banged head-first into April on the wall,
Then exited to twenty flapping towels.
I sighed. I tried my vocal chords. "There were
These three raccoons who lived in Central Park.
They thought that they were monkeys, so they . . ."
"Oh

God!" they said. Of all times to get hiccoughs!
Scare us for a minute." I thought of nature's
Cleverness. Imagine raccoons thinking
They were cats. No, monkeys. No, it was giraffes.
"So, then what happened?" They had stopped. I
thought.

"Well, one day three Italians came to Prospect Park
And rushed to see the hippopotamus
Who'd just produced a little baby boy."

"The present for the Fastenbergs!" they moaned.
"The mail's gone out already. Can we send . . .?"

I dreamed of when I was a child and took
A camel ride to scare my father. I leaned
Across to touch the elephant who heaved
With seven children on his back. His skin
Was prickly like a porcupine who'd had
A crew-cut. (They were back, and asked
If I were sleeping over for the ball
Where I'd be turned into four mice because
I never wore high-heels, just sneakers, and
My arches never would recover. "Princes
Never marry girls who wear green knee-socks,
Sweetie.")

My tongue, divided into four
Partitions, spat the saga of the zoo
While thirty carpenters tore down the chandelier
And waited for the punch-line. No one laughed.
My fingers trembled and my face turned red.
"I'm not so good at telling jokes," I said.

Florence Victor

IT MAY BE SHE WILL LIVE LONG

Aunt Martha bought all new curtains in the spring
And began drinking wine with every meal:
The curtains, scarlet; the wine, well voiced and
fitting.
We're only as old, she announced, as the headsmen
feel.

She once doted on the United Nations
And corresponded with Institutes of Foreign
Policy and knew what natives needed what rations
And how low-cost housing would transform
Astrakhan.

Quite suddenly she jettisoned her zest
For one world and took to no world at all:
The oldest are the soonest buried, that is, in the
West,

She said. So, nieces, we're now oddly equal.

The young cannot believe; the old are comforted;
I'm living the democracy of the dead.
She sold her cemetery plot, cancelled her stone,
Learned bridge, and meditates matrimony.

P. Kendall

FOR HIS ROOT WAS BY MANY WATERS

This boy of the island
Sat with his back to the sea,
Fixing his eyes on the hill,
Staring at profiles that moved,
Watching them carry their burden
In stately procession, onward and upward,
Thinking, "I am Onias.
These people are laying my father to rest
And I hate them.
High on the hill they will seal him
Never to wander, never to go.
Now he belongs to their rocks and their breakers.
I am Onias, his son.
He made a circle around me.
He was my miracle maker."

And he marvelled as they labored,
Sensed their shoulders stiffening,
Called each kinsman's name out softly,
Thus confirming that he knew him,
Knew each kinsman long and well.
"Zeke and Josh and Saul and Isaac,
David, Amos—
Though our eyes have often spoken,
We are strangers now."

The ropes were held tautly,
The coffin was lowered.
The spades spoke defiance as earth covered earth.
He sat with his back to the tides
And he wept: "They have surrounded my father."
The silhouettes halted.
The silhouettes moved.
They gathered the darkness and left.
He wept in his anger and out of despair

For he judged this strangeness harshly.
He stared for hours. He marvelled
At the light he saw upon the hill.
He listened to his endless heartbeats.
“‘Tis the breakers. ‘Tis the sea.
The waves strike hard upon the land.”
He was weary and he fell asleep.

He dreamed:

He saw an old man bent in labor, planting,
Calling this his carob tree.
It was but a seed, Onias plainly saw.
He laughed, “Old man, you will not live to eat its
fruit.

Its shade will never smile upon you.
Why do you do this foolish thing?
You haven’t time. You shall not wait so long.”
The planter touched him lovingly.
“See the open spaces there between the trees?
They know. The tides know too. The shore. The sky.
Time is a man-made prison.
It has walls that hold the memories
And shafts of light that wrench them free.
My father’s father planted too
And I have eaten of that fruit.
You found your comfort in its shade.
My days grow long and longer still
And every vision fails me but this tree.
This tree is ours to wait upon.
Time never was.
But always is
Like space between the trees.
You judge the generations harshly.”

Onias slept. His anger melted out of him.
He dreamed his kinsmen came and lifted him and
took him home.

He heard his mother tell
How frail he was and how much growing up
He had to do before he was a man.

Onias walked the hill and faced the sea.
He thought he saw a light near him.

"My father—

I can hear him breathing."

And he paused. For there were shafts of light upon
him

And he feared he might be crying out too wildly and
too loudly.

Thus he murmured, "This is the altar.

I am the shadow. 'Tis he holds the candle.

The elders surround me.

This is the circle. I am its center.

Circle, circle, I am here."

Onias crossed the threshold.

"He is with me. We have both come home."

The waters nourished him.

The deep made him to grow.

"Oh carob tree, how will I know, what will I know?

When will I know that I do know?

I am Onias, his son."

Hasye Cooperman

AN EVENT

Before the blond horsemen rode into our village
We held a hasty council to decide how to greet them.
It was planned that we would hide the women in
the woods,
Cover our weapons with our sleeping mats in the huts

And greeting them politely
Neither encourage them to stay nor leave.

But when the hoofs raised a sudden dust in the
square

Our hearts were beating so wildly
That nothing happened as we had planned it.
We came out all smiles throwing our weapons at
their feet,

And we feasted them, offering them our gods,
And brought them our women
Whom they accepted with thin curved smiles.
And in the morning they drew a map of the area,
Counted the inhabitants and livestock,
And rode away with our silver ornaments.

Life went on as before and yet,
Did we imagine it, or were there fewer births than
before?

The corn grew smaller,
And not that things had been prosperous
(Our living had always been a scratching in the dust)
But year by year things seemed to diminish.
Now the young men go off to work in the factories
Putting on tight outlandish trousers and cutting
their hair.

Even the women leave: they slip off at night,
And return to visit later, slim and strangely garbed,
Talking without opening their mouths wide.

Perhaps now this is only a place to come home to,
To repeat the stories that everyone knows by heart,
And to look at the dusty flowers
And the children who will be going away soon
Playing naked and dirty among the chickens.

Edward Field

EDDY

My aunt (about the only one I haven't written of)
met a stranger on the beach
and put herself in reach
of love.

The waves
went in and out;
she watched; she thought about
the green grass growing on her parents' graves.

The stranger, lean and hungry, dropped nearby.
My aunt, primping her suit, her hair,
was wide awake and well aware
she gave him the eye.

And when
he took her near
the dark, unpopulated pier,
she heard the green grass growing then,
she heard the green years eddying around
the poles, swishing, and she laughed
till he thought her daft
with her own sound;

and they never stopped
until the moon came out like a burning bush
and my aunt stood triumphant in the hush
where the stranger had dropped.

Now from her small square room she finds it hard
to see that sea, or the growing grass, or hear it,
for there is but one window to the spirit
and it is barred.

Edsel Ford

ALONG THE TRACE

For Katherine Anne Porter

This woman paints pictures on paper
 with words. Her brush is gravely held, hair
 of camel to show the fragile girl
 face (sorrow wrapped in a rebosa).
 A knife will carve the quickened color
 from palette to canvas, and strike the
 man-form figure with a single stroke,
 poetry in the curve of the line
 falling into song with a Latin
 beat, now retreating, now lunging down
 to break home with shout of strength, rounding
 hill and mesa, returning echoes
 along the trace to fireside and love
 or silence in a man, to Christ in
 agony, holding the nails that keep
 Him away from me, and bring Him close.

David A. Locher

IT DOTH MAKE A DIFFERENCE

To Katherine Anne Porter

"It doth make a difference whence cometh a man's
 joy,"
 you wrote on the flyleaf of your *Flowering Judas*
 like a label indicating my twilight mood has
 kinship with Augustine (who leapt from the shell of
 boy
 when he tapped the dayspring at a very last minute).
 I fondle my shivering cup to toast you, lady,
 lettered in art and, I think, man's awkward "Late
 have I
 loved Thee" (beyond the wheat tender mornings he
 had lacked).
It is not that he withers flesh as the sky withers

*the blossom soft branches at the chill time of a year.
He is prodigal in what he deliciously gives.*

(But I've spent that symbol!) Your long standing

Tree fathers

the child who never sprang from *my* loins, and I can
hear

in this sparkling old grape how it is your Austin
loves.

Raymond Roseliep

THE TOAD

Go to the toad, thou frenetic
homunculus:

who merely sits
in the tall grass awaiting flies
to cross the radius of his curled
tongue,

who, maligned of humans,
ponders the earth and its seasons while
digesting mosquitoes in batrachian
somnolence,

who, amphibious poet,
would practise the calm calligraphy of
the T'ang dynasty,

who, humble
pacifist, plays dead when attacked and,
terrestrial, yet seeks water for his
erotic transports,

and who, one
afternoon as the sun cleaved idle
loquacity, appeared great and swift
to Saint Teresa's startled gaze.

Julian Palley

THE GALLERY

Korea, 1951: a place

Of strange allurements and a stranger race.

Charley, my friend, flies missions every night;

I go at noon, and have more view. Last flight

Our jet planes slanted upward at command—

Winged pencils streaking thunder through the land.

Over the Han, bright farmlands rolled, where we

Could watch neat, abstract squares in revery;

Soon hills hunched north, above the patterned crops

With wild, dry grass in wastelands on their tops;

Then in the buffer zone, details below

Were those which only troops afoot would know:

Our men spread orange strips: we knew them by

Color alone, which strikes the airborne's eye.

And as we flew on, codes directed us

With "Sugar Charley three-nine, two-four plus,

Gearshaft reporting." Under us the ground

Showed numerous small pockholes, scattered around

And blemishing the hillsides. We attacked

And by the tinsel flash of bullets tracked

Our high-speed marksmanship. The afternoon

Then slowly passed; I would watch clouds balloon

Over the bare hills as I searched beneath,

But nothing else moved. So I flew northeast

To a village filled, according to reports,

With Chinamen. Smoke, rubble of all sorts,

And a few thatched huts still stood there; carefully

I dropped on one a napalm, and could see

The fire unroll: around the building's frame

It jelled to shape: a cube of ruby flame.

Above, green summits, with their powdered snow,

Flickered their surfaces from shade; below

The town lay, ruddy-toned. Then from the hut

Two figures moved: two jerky daubs of smut
Marring the scene's set beauty. Not for long—
A swoop, a touch of gunfire—they were gone.
But the flame's high glow soon went too, and the sun
Blurred behind distant fog; my day was done.
Homeward, the gallery showed in reverse:
Crag, steep as in a Chinese painting, first;
Then slopes which, down to lion-colored hills,
Twisted with zig-zagged terraces and rills;
And last, the geometric grainfields, pressed
Into valleys, then on lowlands. Just southwest
Our base—with friends, food, showers—waited; then
We could discourse in human terms again.
For such is war: we have more than our share
Of being among abstractions: in the air
We live with our controls; our speed and height
Hold us aloof—our pattern is our flight.
But Charley, at least, and I can understand
The beauties of this god-forsaken land.

John N. Miller

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